

The NEW BIRTH.

BEING THE

SUBSTANCE

OF A

DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT

MALMSBURY in WILTSHIRE,

In the YEAR 1741.

By JOHN CENNICK. *K*

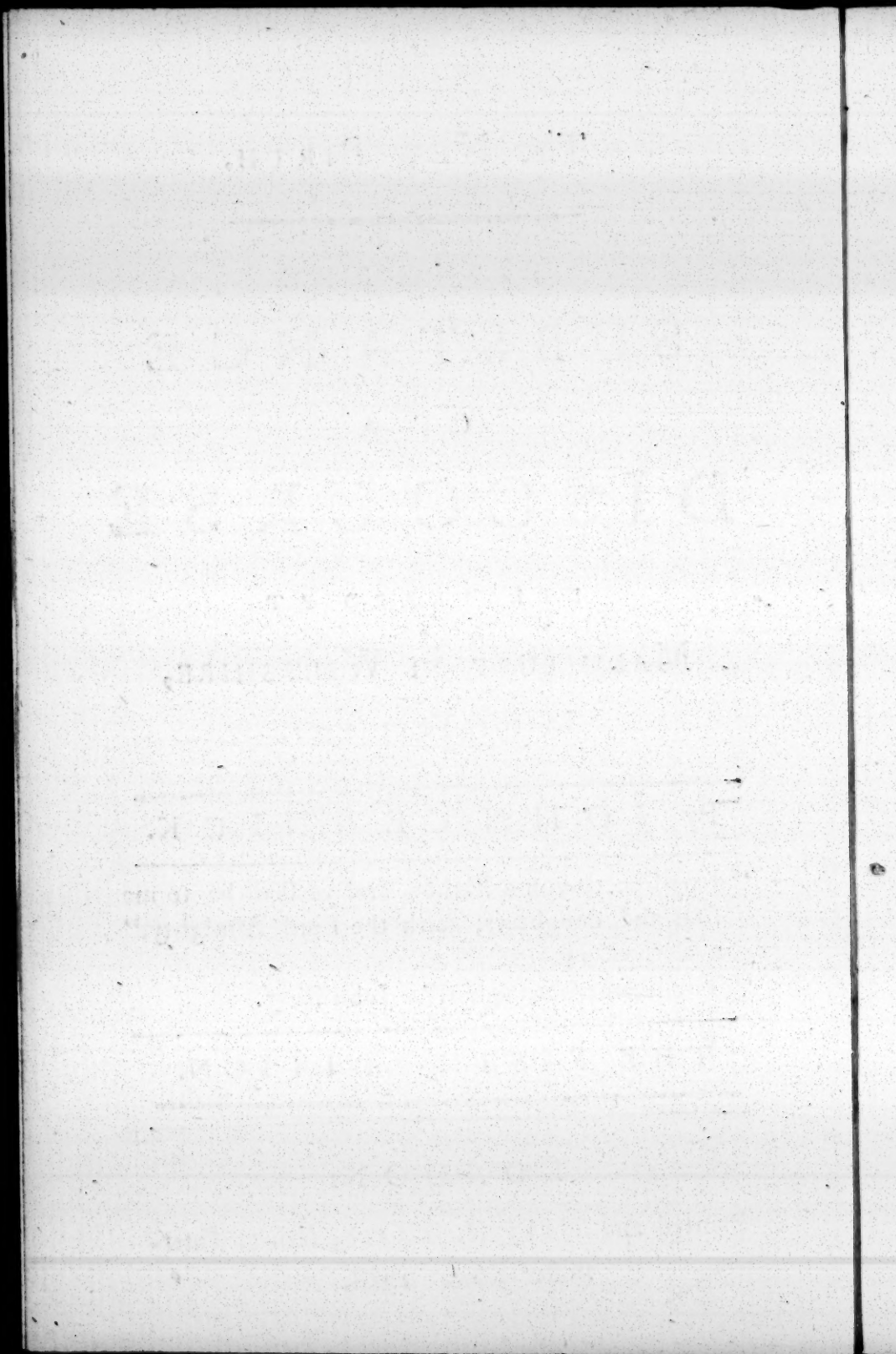
“I will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me
sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”
2 Cor. vi. 18.

“Ye must be born again.” John iii. 7.

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JOHN iii. 3.

Except a Man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.

THIS is part of the discourse our Saviour had with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, who came by night to him, and talked with him of the kingdom. It should seem that this man had been one of the best of the Jews, and who waited for the consolation of Israel; and as at that time many devout people were in daily expectation of the coming of the Messiah, or the Desire of all nations, so he was inquisitive who our Saviour could be, having heard of his miracles, and was assured, as he tells Jesus, that he was no mere man, but a teacher come from God. "For, saith he, no man can do these miracles which thou dost except God be with him."

Our Saviour knew well the gross and carnal ideas of the children of Israel about the kingdom, and began at once to tell him, that his kingdom was not to be seen with the outward eyes, or as he said to the Pharisees in another Place, "It cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here, or, lo there, for the kingdom of heaven is within you," Luke xvii. 20, 21. Thus he now teaches one of their chief rabbies, that no one un-

converted could see the kingdom, much less enter into it, "Verily, verily, he saith, I say unto thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Although this doctrine had been taught in David and Ezekiel, Psalm l. 10. Ezek. xxxvi. 26 and in other scriptures of the prophets, yet it appeared quite new to Nicodemus, and struck him with amazement, so that he asked directly, "How a man could be born when he was old? Can he, saith he, enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Our Saviour told him, if a man could enter into his mother's womb and be born again, that would not help him, for still he would be flesh, and of the same nature of that from which he was born, but he says, "He must be born of water and of the Holy Ghost; he must have a spiritual birth, and become spirit of his Father, who is a spirit, and by whom the sons of God are begotten of incorruptible seed, and bids Nicodemus not marvel at it, for a third time he saith, "Ye must be born again." He was more and more astonished at this doctrine, and by his question, "How can this be?" he confesses, he was a stranger to this mystery, and did not understand the new birth. Our Saviour, to convince him that there are things earthly not to be accounted for, and which yet are real and true, mentions the wind, which one hears and feels, but "can not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth, so, says he, is every one born of the Spirit." As if he would have said, How can one describe the wind to him who has not felt or heard it, or account for why it blows to day high and not to morrow, or whence it comes, or whither it goes, and yet we know there is such a thing as wind? so one born again, one on whom the Lord has breathed a second time,
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and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," can be assured of this mercy, and thenceforward be a partaker of the kingdom of God, feel in his heart the happy change he works there by his Spirit, rejoice in his salvation, know he is a child of God, and partaker of his divine nature, as surely as he was flesh of his natural father's flesh, and with all boldness can call Abba Father, having received the Spirit of adoption, and being really born again into the family and household of God; but he cannot reveal or describe it to another; he cannot account for it; nor can he make another, whose eyes the Lord has not opened, see the kingdom and happiness to which he is restored, because it is what no man knows but him that receiveth it.

Nicodemus heard all our Saviour said, but continued yet to reason about this new birth, till our Saviour asked him, "Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things? If I have told you of earthly things and ye believe not, how should you believe if I tell you of heavenly?" i. e. If I have told you of the wind, which is earthly, and you do not comprehend or understand, how can you understand heavenly things which are past finding out? This part of our Saviour's discourse should teach us two things:

First, That all masters in Israel, all rulers, preachers, and ministers of God's word, should first of all know and be witnesses of this mystery, and none should venture to teach others till they are taught these things, and have learned them of God; for this is the true character of a servant of Christ; we speak what we know, and testify what we have seen; and thus properly are they his witnesses; they not only preach the divine truths in words, but have themselves proved and experienced them

them in their own hearts. "We are witnesses," says St. Peter, of these things."

Secondly, We must learn to bridle our too curious search into some matters, because they are too high for us, and believe, because the Lord has said it, without wanting to understand how it can be, or endeavouring to comprehend or give reasons for the mysteries of Christ, since his matters are not like the things of the world, which men may search out and account for, though in many things they fail and fall short; but in the things of God we should always think, "as the heavens are above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts. His ways are in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known."

In this doctrine of the New Birth, this humble mind is necessary; for, like as a blind man cannot be a judge of colours till his eyes are opened; nor the man born and brought up in some close place be able to understand any thing of the wind till he has felt and heard it, so neither can any one judge of the work of God upon the soul, till he has obtained, of his loving Lord, an understanding, whereby, as St. John says, "We know him:" or, what our Saviour calls "ears to hear, eyes to see, and a heart to understand." When this is done, he shall find no such difficulty to believe, or find the right way; for fools shall not err therein: and a babe thus taught of God is wise, and understands, believes, and is already happy and saved.

It is remarkable, our Saviour does not go about to demonstrate the matter, or explain it, for that is no where his way. He saith, and we are to believe for his word's sake, nor must we look for a greater or better proof of the truth than that he has said it, "It is written," we do not trust him, and where a
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demonstration is given, faith is not of use. He is God, and worthy to be believed; and as here in this world our main attainment is not to comprehend, or fathom, or know as we are known, but to believe, and in the world to come we shall see and pry into the deep things of God, where there is no danger of pride, and where we shall know perfectly; therefore let us endeavour only to feel, to experience, and enjoy in our hearts this great blessedness, which no natural man can understand, but will constantly enquire, "How can this be?" till his heart feels the want of a New Birth, and then with tears and prayers he will seek it and find it.

I shall now speak briefly of these three heads; First, Of the necessity of the New Birth. Secondly, Treat of its happy effects in the heart. And, Thirdly, Of the means of this change, as far as it concerns us.

Our fall in Adam, and the corrupt and wicked nature we bring with us in to the world, has made a regeneration absolutely necessary; and though I know how many strive to oppose the doctrine of original, or the first sin, yet I so treat all arguments, and those things said directly against the words of scripture, just as St. Paul calls it, "The wisdom of men, and what is foolishness with God." All the law and gospel agree, "that in Adam all died. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Thou art called a transgressor from the womb. The thoughts of man's heart are evil from his youth. "I was born in sin, and in sin did my mother conceive me. All are gone out of the way, there is none good, no not one." These are some of the many scriptures which prove the general and universal fall and decay, and which is the reason why we must be born again. If there
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had been no ruining of all, then all need not be renewed; and if we had not a bad and corrupt nature, a heart which is not good in the sight of God, then there would be no need of a new nature. If, therefore, no scripture could be brought in confirmation of the doctrine of the fall but the text itself, it would prove it sufficiently: for either God created us bad, or we are fallen: or if a man can be so blind as to think we are well, we have a good nature, we are not fallen, nor spoiled, nor ruined, then he must see no need of a New Birth, and despise the doctrine our Saviour has taught so plain in this his discourse with Nicodemus, and in many other places of his gospel; and is verily and indeed dead, and his foolish heart is darkened and blinded by the god of this world, who therefore keeps him ignorant of his lost state, lest he should see the need of the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and should seek it with all his heart and be saved.

Let who will oppose it, the true doctrine is this; We were created upright, innocent, and very good, but satan, who envied our happiness, found means to seduce our first parents into sin; and when they, to whom God had given in subjection all things in the world, fell into the enemy's hands, all went to wreck, and all born afterwards were home-born slaves of satan; nor was it possible for it to be otherwise; for Adam having forfeited his right to be a son of God, and having been now poisoned and hurt by sin, could not beget children in a better nature than he had himself, nor could a clean thing come out of an unclean; but all the whole lump of mankind was leavened with the direful leaven, and the curse came upon all. In this wo-
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ful condition was the earth and all souls, when God looked down from heaven and saw "how all flesh had corrupted their way before him, and were like sheep gone astray," or Vines degenerated and become wild and worthless; and here he opened and revealed his eternal purpose, which was to save us out of this horrible pit, and restore us to the dignity of sons of God; wherefore he did not leave us in our fallen estate, or forsake us unhelped, but resolved to make all things new, and to give especially a New Birth to such as believe in him, which should be brought about and effected by the Holy Ghost; and so we, who were by nature children of wrath, might become children of grace, and receive the Spirit of adoption, whereby we can call God, in the strictest sense, my Father; and this, after our Saviour had redeemed us by his death, he goes on to do for us now. He gives us a new heart, or, as David calls it, "a clean heart and a new Spirit, and he is our God, and we are his people. We are his sons and daughters, and he is to us a Father;" and thus saith the Lord God Almighty in the scriptures.

It is a false and dangerous notion which some entertain, that our Saviour by his cross only set us a good example, and that at best we can become no more than servants of God, for therefore said our Saviour, "I have not called you servants. I go to your Father and my Father, to your God and to my God." And St. Paul says, "We are not servants but sons;" and this is a common thing in the bible to see the believers and elect of God called his children, his sons, his family, his flesh and bones, &c.

But lest any should despise this glorious liberty of becoming children of God, and be tempted to

stop short of the prize of our high calling, I must yet add one thing, and that is this, A New Birth is not only necessary to make us joint-heirs of the glory to come with Christ, but none can be saved without it: none can go to heaven, none can see the kingdom, or enter into it, who has not experienced this change. To make it doubly weighty and important, our Saviour delivers this truth with his usual solemnity in such cases, "Verily, verily I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." He says it who cannot lie. The word is gone out of his mouth who cannot repent, and is confirmed with an everlasting Amen.

Whoever can yet think so lightly of the matter as if he can be saved though he be an entire stranger to this birth of the Spirit, this new creation wrought in the heart, he shall find our Lord and Master does not trifle or jest, his words are true and faithful, and to suppose one can be saved who is not born again, is to suppose our Saviour can break his word and oath. No, he shall be found true, though the whole race of men should perish. Let therefore none venture too far thus presumptuously, lest they repent too late; nor make light of this doctrine, lest they should be found speechless in that day when our Saviour shall make it appear, they once heard of the necessity of being born again, but they despised it.

Many deceive themselves, by thinking they do not despise it, but hope it is no other than baptism, or another name given to a change of behaviour and manners, &c. but even their easy and careless thoughts about so great a matter is a sort of despising of it; for, if any thing, we should be sure it should be in this, since without it we cannot be saved, nor
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see the kingdom of God. How many have been baptized who are still utter strangers to this renovation, or renewal of the heart? How many have changed their morals, and altered their course of life, who never experienced a New-Birth, or are sure what it means to this day?

I will not dispute but that some have been born again at the time of their baptism, (for we have instances of it in the scripture) and that others, whose course of life have been altered, were also born again from above; but without this in the heart, without the work of the Holy Ghost, who washes us in the blood and water out of Christ's side, all the rest is but an empty sign and shadow, but not the substance: I will therefore again and again beseech and pray you, be aware lest you, like the Jews, boast of your church privileges, &c. and be, after all, no child of God. "He is not a Jew who is a Jew outwardly, whose circumcision is in the flesh, but he is a Jew who is a Jew inwardly, whose circumcision is in the heart." He is not a true Israelite who can only glory that Abraham was his father, but he who walks in the steps of the faith of Abraham, so think you. He is not a real christian who only has been baptized with water outwardly, but he is a christian who is one inwardly, who has been baptized with the Holy Ghost and is born again; and he only is a child of God whom the Lord hath made so, and not he who without this glories of his being of the best religion, or a son of the most holy church; for else, let him be what he will, and boast how he please, "except he be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

But now I come to treat of the effects of the New Birth, which is the second thing I proposed to speak of.

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The change made at the time of our adoption and washing in the blood and water Christ shed, is real and happy; for then all those fears, jealousies, and uneasinesses which generally, if not always, precedes it in the upright and sincere, are brought to an end: They are no more afraid of being lost or cast away, for now "God the Spirit beareth witness with their spirit that they are children of God;" and that though a servant abideth not in the house alway, yet a son or child of God abideth alway, and shall go no more out; no man shall pluck them out of their Elder Brother's hands. They feel they are now fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and that henceforth they are numbered with the general assembly and church of the first-born who are written in heaven, they are counted among his jewels, and called his people, and confessed before the Father and all the angels as the sheep of his pasture. They know they no more belong to the world, but are born out of it unto God and the Lamb: When the Lord counteth up his people, it shall be said of Sion, "This man was born there," Jerusalem above is his mother, and as surely as he was born of Adam's flesh and blood, and partook of his nature and sin, so surely is he new-born of the Second Man Adam, and is partaker of his nature, of his spirit and righteousness, so that he can properly and strictly say, Lord, thou art my Father, and our Saviour will not be ashamed to call such brethren. Besides this comfortable alteration in the mind, and over and above the joy that is brought to such at the revealing or manifesting Christ to them; they are indeed endued with a new heart and with a new spirit. Our Lord Jesus has begun to create all things new, and the old strong heart,

heart, the former dead spirit, is taken away, and even the body so far partakes of this New Birth, that those in-dwelling and in-bred impurities and desires are overflowed with the water of regeneration, and drowned in the blood of the Lamb. The body is washed with pure water, as it is written, "I will sprinkle you with water, and you shall be clean:" And now that which was once a sink of sin, a nest of every unclean and hateful bird, a den of thieves, is made the house of God, the temple of the Holy Ghost, who dwelleth thenceforward in them. He who before laboured with them, and drew them near to himself, now is in them, and will make his abode with them. The flesh is not changed, nor will be, till it is returned to the dust from whence it was taken, or till Jesus comes. It will be sown a vile body, and at the appearance of the Lord in that day it shall rise in his likeness; and when he makes a new earth our bodies also shall be made like his glorious body, and therefore is the resurrection called in the scripture, the "redemption of the body." But then, though we who are born again of God have still our weak and spoiled bodies about us till we go hence, yet no child of God may live to himself, or after the flesh but they serve the Lord Christ with their bodies and souls, and all their members become instruments of righteousness. No more do fleshly lusts pollute it, no more are they drunkards, or railers, or disobedient, or lovers of the world, or careless, or servants of sin, they are a redeemed people, and their works, words, and all their behaviour, shew they have been with Jesus. His mark is seen upon their foreheads, his blood besprinkles their modest and lovely conversation, and makes all their words savoury: In short, all old things are done away, behold

behold all things are become new, and every child of God is a new creature, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works, by which their light shines unto men, and they glorify their Father which is in heaven.

I come now to speak of the means of this change, and that is faith. He that believeth is born of God. To them gave he power, or the privilege to become sons of God, even to them that believe in his name, which were born not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. St. Paul also speaks after the same manner: "We are the children of God through faith in Christ Jesus." If you desire to become heirs of the kingdom of heaven, or, as our Saviour says, "Children of the kingdom," then before all things this is needful, which is, a holy confidence and reliance on Christ, a living faith in him. By faith I would not mean what is generally meant in the world, where almost all who call themselves christians imagine they believe; but I mean that faith which we have of God, and which is the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart, whereby we have the firm persuasion and assurance that Jesus the true God was made a man, and suffered out of pure love and mercy to us, our death and curse, and has now fully pardoned our sins and given us eternal life. Do any find they have not such a faith, or are inwardly conscious of their being without the Spirit in their hearts, then let them be serious, and seek it and they shall find it, let them ask and they shall have it, for your heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. But whenever man can make jest of the whole, and one while mock at the inspiration of God, and soon profess they do not believe any such thing, let such know, they cannot receive it because

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of unbelief: they cannot become children of God, since they, in their hearts, do not believe the promises of God nor his doctrines, but cast all his words behind their backs. Though I thus speak, my brethren, I hope better things of you, be you of another mind, and let nothing less than being born again satisfy you, or make you easy. Let it be your chiefest and highest aim to be our Saviour's mother, and sister, and brother, for such are they, and they only, who have his Father for their Father, and his God for their God, and are born again of the same Spirit which bare him of the virgin Mary, and conceived him, and brought to pass his incarnation. May that Holy Spirit even now give you to understand all I have said, and awaken you to a thorough knowledge of your fallen Estate, and neither leave you nor forsake you, till he has made you sons of God, and manifested and applied the merits and blood and water of our Saviour Jesus to your hearts, and enable you to say, or rather force you with joy to confess, I am born of God; he is my Father, my God, and my strong Salvation.

To that Holy Ghost, together with the Father, and his Son Christ Jesus, be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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